DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 429 036 SP 038 365

AUTHOR	Freeland, Kent; Willis, Melinda
TITLE	Integrated College Methods Courses.
PUB DATE	1999-02-00
NOTE	16p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Block Scheduling; Elementary Education; Higher Education; *Integrated Curriculum; *Methods Courses; Preservice Teacher Education; *Student Teacher Evaluation; Student Teachers
IDENTIFIERS	Morehead State University KY

ABSTRACT

This study compared the performance of two groups of preservice teachers at Kentucky's Morehead State University. One group had taken four of their methods courses (reading, language arts, social studies, and mathematics) in an integrated fashion from four faculty members. This group was termed the block group. The other group (the nonblock group) took the four methods courses separately. The two groups were part of a large group of student teachers who student taught during the Fall 1997 semester. Their student-teacher supervisors were given an opinionnaire survey to rate the performance of the block and nonblock students. The survey had them rate student teachers as two groups, not as individuals. Survey questions addressed five topics: designing/planning instruction, creating/maintaining learning climates, implementing/managing instruction, assessing/communicating learning results, and self-evaluation of teaching. Data analysis indicated that the block students, who had taken integrated methods courses, performed as well as, or better than, the nonblock student teachers, who had taken their methods courses in the traditional separate approach. (SM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 429 036

Integrated College Methods Courses

Kent Freeland
Melinda Willis

Morehead State University

SP038365

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K. Freeland

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Abstract

This research study compared the performance of two groups of preservice student teachers at Morehead State University (MSU). One group had taken four of their methods courses (reading, language arts, social studies, and mathematics) in an integrated fashion from four faculty members. This group was termed the "block" group. The other group (the nonblock group) took these four methods courses separately.

The two groups were part of a large group of student teachers during the fall 1997 semester. The student teacher supervisors were given an opinionnaire to rate the performance of the block and nonblock students. The data from the study indicated that block student teachers (who had taken integrated methods courses) seemed to perform as well as (and better than, in some cases) than the nonblock student teachers who had taken their methods courses in the traditional separate approach. One of the implications of this study is that it is worthwhile to continue the arrangement of offering blocked integrated methods courses.

Integrated College Methods Courses

Introduction

In the Spring 1993 semester a small number of undergraduate students became the first group at Morehead State University (MSU) to enroll in a blocked section of four early elementary methods courses: social studies, mathematics, reading, and language arts. Each fall and spring semester since that time one blocked section of each of the K–4 methods courses has been offered in an attempt to create a learning environment which more closely resembles that which they might experience in a classroom when they teach. Many public schools in the state of Kentucky arrange children in the lower elementary level in a nongraded fashion, with no designated grade levels. Moreover, instruction in this nongraded primary school is often integrated, so that teachers try to present subjects in a combined manner. Teaching social studies during a separate half hour, or teaching reading just during a morning "reading group" hour has given way in the public schools to units which contain lessons that blend a number of subjects, such as language arts, science, or mathematics.

MSU initiated collaboration and integration with some of its university courses in 1997 in preparation for its new general education program. Although curriculum integration is commonly done in the elementary grades, and also done to some degree in middle school and high school, it is infrequently carried out at the postsecondary level (Dykman, 1997). Generally speaking, it appears that a single obstacle exists in all of the integrated curriculum efforts from primary grades through university, namely, the unclear effect it has on the students (McDaniel, Rios, Stowell, and Christopher, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this project was to investigate whether a particular arrangement of taking methods courses has beneficial results. Presently, the Department of Elementary, Reading, & Special Education at MSU offers two avenues for students to take methods courses in the early elementary education (K-4) program. One avenue is a traditional means by which each course (mathematics, social studies, language arts, and reading) is presented individually with no overt connections between classes. The other arrangement, blocked methods courses, allows students to participate in methods courses which involve collaboration and planned integration of the curriculum subjects.

In a broad sense, this project conformed to ideas presented recently by other educators. Fogarty (1991) presents ten ways to view curriculum. "Fragmented" with distinct disciplines is at one end of the spectrum; at the other end is "networked," suggesting that a student's studies lead to other self-selected areas of learning. In between are the curriculum approaches of connected, nested, sequenced, shared, webbed, threaded, integrated, and immersed.

The integrated approach is the one that Lawler-Prince, Altieri, and Cramer (1996) consider an exciting instructional strategy for the early elementary grades. Undergraduate students need to be taught how to integrate the various disciplines that they will be teaching to elementary children (Tchudi and Lafer, 1996). Integration can be demonstrated when thematic units are created in methods classes and taught in the school (Freeland and Smith, 1993; Allen and Piersma, 1995).

Integration needs to be modeled by university teacher educators if undergraduate students

are expected to implement this technique in public schools. Wright, Sorrels, and Granby (1996) sought to determine if the integrated block methods courses taught at their institution resulted in preparing effective student teachers. Public school teachers in this study completed questionnaires which contained items about classroom abilities. Results indicated significantly higher scores for these student teachers in the areas of integrated lesson planning and overall preparation.

Procedures

At MSU only one blocked section of each of the four methods courses is offered during a semester. Other undergraduate students take their methods courses in the traditional non-blocked arrangement. This means that a group of undergraduates assigned to a primary school for their student teaching semester reflects a mixture: a few of them have taken four blocked methods courses while the preponderance have taken individual methods courses. The researchers investigated whether the performance of student teachers who have completed the block program is better than the performance of student teachers who have taken all of their methods courses individually.

The researchers sent a Likert scale opinionnaire survey instrument to six MSU faculty who supervised student teachers in the primary grades during the Fall 1997 semester. The supervisors were asked to evaluate their student teachers as two groups, not as individuals. In other words, they were to consider how the *group* of former block students performed compared to the *group* which had not taken the block. The supervisors--in addition to marking a number on the Likert

scale--had the opportunity on the opinionnaire to provide narrative comments about the performance of the two groups of student teachers. The MSU faculty--at the end of the semester--based their opinions on data gained from observing a total of eighteen student teachers they supervise. The opinionnaire instrument contained questions about the ability of student teachers to complete certain tasks. Questions on the survey instrument were derived from established procedures used in the Kentucky Teacher Intern Program (a program to assess first-year teachers). These questions address the following five topics:

a) designing/planning instruction (creating plans)

b) creating/maintaining learning climates (organizing a classroom for effective instruction)

c) implementing/managing instruction (carrying out teaching practices)

d) assessing/communicating learning results (using criteria to evaluate performance)

e) self-evaluation of teaching (considering his or her own success with a teaching experience)

All of the MSU supervisors were knowledgeable about the above five, for they are important components of the student teacher evaluation system at the university. The researchers analyzed the responses from the instrument to determine whether those who have completed the block program performed better than those who did not complete the block program.

Results

Overall results of this study indicate that the performance of the block group was better than that of the non-block group. In each of the five categories, the mean was higher for the

block group than the non-block group (see Table 1).

A closer look at the response data shows that in four of the five categories the majority of individual raters indicated that the performance of the block group was about the same as the non-block group. Anecdotal data supplied by the raters suggests that within each group there were students (both block and non-block) who were outstanding in terms of individual performance, but when considered as a group the performances were about the same. Additionally, in a few cases raters who were supervising just one block student had to compare this student to the other group which had several non-block students. In these instances the comparisons and subsequent results should be cautiously interpreted. It should be noted, however, in no category did any rater indicate that the performance of the block group was poorer than the non-block group. Following are some comments supplied by the student teacher supervisors on their survey instruments which pertained to the five categories:

Designs/plans instruction: "Students created more indepth units encompassing many more disciplines. Use of literature (children's) more evident in kicking off and daily unit integration of block student."

Creates/maintains learning environments: "I think that most of the time the climate is already established by the cooperating teacher."

Implements/manages instruction: "Both cooperating teachers for block students generally collaborated more with colleagues; hence student teachers do also. Block students able to mesh plans and instruction and adapt as situation warrants."

Assesses/communicates learning results: "The only difference that I have noted is that the

LBDs (Learning Behavior Disorders student teachers) are better at this than the other students. This is a very weak area overall."

Reflects upon/evaluates teaching and learning: "Block students seem more sure of themselves. They expect lessons to go a certain way and seem to be able to make any adjustments to make it go that way."

Limitations

Only MSU student teacher supervisors were used in this study. Public school teachers who worked with the student teachers in the classroom could have been surveyed to get a corroborating view of how they felt the student teachers performed. Another limitation was that the researchers only compared groups, not individuals. Although it would require more time on part of the MSU supervisors, it might be interesting to ask them to complete a performance evaluation on each student they worked with. A third limitation is the small number of student teachers involved in the study: eighteen block students and forty-one nonblock students. Similarly, there were just six MSU supervisors. A look at the ratio shows that one MSU supervisor had just one block student while another MSU supervisor had seven.

Implications

There was no indication from the data in this study that block students did worse than the nonblock students. In fact, it appears that the block students did as well as--and in some cases better than--the nonblock students. On that basis, the block arrangement should remain in the

curriculum for the Department of Elementary, Reading, & Special Education at MSU.

This study needs to be repeated during the upcoming years, since the intention is to decide if the block arrangement of methods courses should be continued. Best practice suggests that methods students learn best through integrated methods courses; however, there is a cost. The arrangement requires a great deal of extra time on the part of the faculty as the four of them must meet with one another to create lesson plans, coordinate their team teaching, and work with the university students in their field placements.

It would be interesting to alter the focus of the assessment of the student teachers' performance. For example, a future study might investigate how the two groups did on specific factors: How do block and nonblock students compare on the ability to teach reading? How do block and nonblock students compare on their competence with large group instruction?

An important future project would be to ask public school teachers who work with student teachers and the student teachers themselves to assess how effective they feel they are in the classroom. Added to the MSU supervisors' opinions, this would be a way to compile and compare the views of three parties.

References

Allen, D. & Piersma, M. (1995). Developing thematic units: Process & product. Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers.

Dykman, Ann (1997). The great college divide: Integrating curriculum at the postsecondary level presents unique challenges. Techniques, 72, (2), 36-39.

Fogarty, Robin (1991). The mindful school: How to integrate the curriculum. Palatine, IL: IRI/Skylight Publishing, Inc.

Freeland, Kent & Smith, K. (1993). A thematic teaching unit on flight. Social Studies and the Young Learner, 5 (4), 15-17

Lawler-Prince, Diane, Altieri, Jennifer, & Cramer, Mary (1996). Moving toward an integrated curriculum in early childhood education. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association.

McDaniel, Janet, Rios, Francisco, Stowell, Laura, & Christopher, Patricia (November 1994). Do as we do and as we say: Modeling curriculum integration in teacher education. Middle School Journal, 25 (2), 14-20.

Tchudi, Stephen & Lafer, Stephen (1996) The interdisciplinary teacher's handbook. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Wright, Eileen, Sorrels, Robert, & Granby, Cheryl (1996). A five-year journey: Integrating teacher education methods courses. Action in Teacher Education, 18 (1), 39-47.

Bibliography

Allen, Diane & Piersma, Mary (1995). Developing thematic units: Process & product. Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers.

Blenkinsop, Sandra & Bailey, Penelope. (1995, April). An inquiry into collaboration and subject area integration in teacher education. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA.

Dykman, Ann (1997). The great college divide: Integrating curriculum at the postsecondary level presents unique challenges. Techniques, 72 (2), 36-39.

Fogarty, Robin (1991). The mindful school: How to integrate the curriculum. Palatine, IL: IRI/Skylight Publishing, Inc.

Freeland, Kent & Smith, K. (1993). A thematic teaching unit on flight. Social Studies and the Young Learner, 5 (4), 15-17

Lawler-Prince, Diane, Altieri, Jennifer, & Cramer, Mary (1996). Moving toward an integrated curriculum in early childhood education. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association.

Mason, Terrence (1996). Integrated curricula: Potential and problems. Journal of Teacher Education, 47 (4), 265-270.

McDaniel, Janet, Rios, Francisco, Stowell, Laura, & Christopher, Patricia (1994). Do as we do and as we say: Modeling curriculum integration in teacher education. Middle School Journal, 25 (2), 14-20.

Pappas, Christine, Kiefer, Barbara, & Levstik, Linda (1996). An integrated language perspective in the elementary school: Theory into action (2nd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman

Sandoval, Pamela (1996). How deep is collaboration? Teacher education curriculum, course curriculum, and the field. Contemporary Education, 67 (4), 233-236.

Status of strategic directions for 1992-96. (1996). Morehead, KY: Morehead State University.

Strategic plan: 1996-2001. (1997). Morehead, KY: College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Morehead State University.

Tchudi, Stephen & Lafer, Stephen (1996). The interdisciplinary teacher's handbook. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Wright, Eileen, Sorrels, Robert, & Granby, Cheryl (1996). A five-year journey: Integrating teacher education methods courses. Action in Teacher Education, 18 (1), 39-47.

Table 1

Performance Categories by Response Categories and Means

	"5"	"4"	"3"	"2"	"1"	X
Designs/plans instruction	2	0	4	0	0	3.66
Creates/maintains learning climates	1	1	4	0	0	3.50
Implements/manages instruction	1	2	3	0	0	3.66
Assesses/communicates learning results	2	0	4	0	0	3.66
Reflects upon/evaluates teaching and learning	2	0	4	0	0	3.66

Note. Response category explanations for Table 1:

5 = Group B (block) vastly better than group NB (non-block)

4 = Group B (block) better than group NB (non-block)

3 = Group B (block) the same as group NB (non-block)

2 = Group B (block) poorer than group NB (non-block)

1 = Group B (block) vastly poorer than group NB (non-block)